

Convocation, Fall 2016
August 29, 2016

Good afternoon, everyone; and best wishes for AY2017! May it be full of reward and accomplishment and discovery and joy in your work. May it be the best year ever—for the college and for all of us!

A warm welcome especially to new members of our community—as I always say to our incoming students—we're grateful for the many gifts you are bringing to us, and we look forward to many years of wonderful contributions to our shared mission!

Before I begin: let me take just a moment to follow up on Lois Harr's mention in her prayer of Father George Hill. As many of you know, Fr. Hill has been battling cancer for some time—and has continued through some intense chemotherapy to serve in his role as campus minister and be present in the community. This summer has been a very difficult one for him. He is at present in the Methodist Home, across the street. It appears that he may be there for some time.

Lois Harr and her colleagues in Campus ministry and social action are working to try to fill in the considerable gap this creates in our ability to serve our students and our community. (In addition to liturgies, Fr. Hill runs a host of programs—including a very popular Meditation group—and is a much beloved counselor and guide to so many of our students, including many of our student-athletes.) I would ask you at this time to be particularly attentive to this need as we continue to pray for our campus pastor's return to health—and, we hope, eventually to his ministry. . .

I was looking back the other day at remarks I've made in this forum in past years —and noticed something that kind of surprised me.

In several instances from as recently as two years ago, I made reference at some point to how good it was to see the campus come back to life after the quiet inactivity of the summer. What struck me was that, while there's nothing like the thrill of the influx of thousands of students into the residence halls, or the return of faculty and staff to classes and fall office hours, the contrast between summer and fall has gotten much less pronounced over the years.

Summer school offerings continue to grow. The summer student research program has blossomed (engaging over 60 scholars in residence this year). Our faculty and administrative staff are creating more and more programs to support incoming students in their transition to college (for example, our new Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program—or CSTEP—and other summer bridge programs that have been developed through our Center for Academic Success).

We're running—or hosting—an increasing number and variety of programs targeted to encourage high school students—especially those from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds—to aspire to college (our longstanding Engineering Awareness program and

our newer Summer Literacy Institute, for example). And, thanks to the hard work of our business and conference services offices—as well as the increasing attractiveness and functionality of our facilities—we’re seeing healthy increases in summer residential programs. It’s great to see all of this creative use of campus and all this growth in our offerings to our students, prospective students, and the wider community.

But, still: there’s nothing like fall semester—bringing as it does the thrill of new beginnings—and last week was pretty exciting and enlivening.

It seems that every year our week-before-opening—and Opening Weekend for first year students—gets more and more robust and effective—from the last summer orientation session through move-in days, to the kick off of the Arches program and the common interest communities, new faculty orientations (for both fulltime and adjunct faculty), and New Student Convocation. We’ve made significant changes to these programs in recent years and I think they’ve really helped to set a great tone and foster a sense of belonging and community.

The New Student Convocation, held last Friday, has been a terrific addition to Opening Weekend—and this year, I think, the speakers did a particularly fine job in fulfilling its major goal: that is, to impress upon the new class the importance of taking advantage of the rich intellectual resources to which they have ready access.

Both the student speaker, Max Pietrzak, and this year’s faculty speaker, Evelyn Scaramella (from Modern Languages and Literatures), were excellent. Both offered messages that were a combination of what one might expect at any such convocation at any college or university—work hard, do honest work, reach out beyond your boundaries, —etc. AND points of emphasis that are distinctively part of Manhattan’s culture as a Lasallian Catholic college in New York City.

Both speakers emphasized the importance of liberal arts education; of cultivating thoughtfulness as well as pursuing knowledge and technical competence; of taking advantage of the opportunity to get to know their professors; of using NYC as a resource; of searching for illumination on the hard questions of life; of using one’s gifts in service to the common good; and on practicing civility.

Professor Scaramella focused especially on this last crucial message—calling students to practice “radical empathy”—when it comes to understanding and engaging in dialogue concerning the deep divisions that currently fracture our communities, our political world, and our increasingly global society. The messages were, in a word, inspiring.

These orientation and community-building events, I believe, are important not just because they inject a bit of salutary academic seriousness into orientation, but also because they encourage students to see themselves as part of a community and an educational tradition that is much bigger than themselves and their personal ambitions—and one that has resources to help them to develop their capacity for thoughtfulness and interiority—and, yes, for “radical empathy.”

To shift to a somewhat more mundane and pragmatic level: All of this summer work is also important for our recruitment and enrollment efforts.

You've all heard of the enrollment management metaphor of "summer melt"—referring to the fact that every summer a significant portion of students who have deposited with a given school in May do not actually matriculate in the fall, whether because they've had second thoughts about college, been picked off a waiting list elsewhere, decided to go to school closer to home, or a less expensive school, or for any number of reasons "Melt" is the reason that, while we had deposits last May in excess of what we had set as our budget target, we thought it prudent to delay full implementation of the FY17 budget, including authorizing salary increases—until we saw where our actual numbers would be in the fall.

Our Enrollment management team has always been great at managing melt . . . keeping it historically in the 8 to 9 percent range. But in recent years, in part because we've become more deliberate in engaging students throughout the summer, the results have been extraordinary—and this year it looks like we'll be more in the range of 5 to 6 percent.

And as of Monday . . . we have an incoming class of 825 new fulltime freshmen and 185 transfer students—or about 30 students over the number projected for new students in the June budget. Residence halls are once again just about at capacity, with 2,015 students in residence, including 610 (or about 75%) of the class of 2020.

And it's not just the number of students that is impressive. They are also a very diverse and academically strong cohort of entering students. Average Verbal and Math SATs for the class of 2020, at 1106, are up 6 points from last year—an increase of 12 from the year before, and of 30 points compared with the class that entered in 2012 and graduated this past year. HS GPA remains strong, at just under 90%.

Diversity numbers are very similar to last year, with a slight decline in the percentage of Hispanic students (21.8% last year; 20.2% this year). And we continue to maintain our mission-driven emphasis on access, with just under 35% first generation students and just under 29% from families eligible to receive Pell grants.

Also of note is the fact that we achieved these results while staying well within our budgeted financial aid—something that we know from many of our competitors is increasingly difficult. All of this is of course good news, and a testament to our continuing and increasingly strong reputation for excellence and value.

As always, we will need to get past our census date before officially putting the full budget into effect; but based on what we're seeing so far, we remain cautiously optimistic that we will be able to do that in early October.

We also look forward, post census, to continuing the good work that was done last year in collaboration with the Faculty Welfare Committee and Council for Faculty Affairs in defining and achieving our goals for fair and competitive salaries throughout the College, as we work to implement the recommendations of last year's salary study and seek to expand that study in the coming year to staff and administration. Thank you as always for your patience, and thanks once again to our colleagues in Enrollment Management—and to all

who participate in the crucial activities of recruiting the incoming class—on another successful year.

Two more pieces of good news about enrollment before I move on: 1. Graduate enrollment. As you know, our strategic plan sets goals for steady growth in graduate education—both by promoting existing programs, and developing new programs in areas that fit our mission and expertise. (The overall goal to about double our graduate enrollment, deliberately and carefully, over the course of several years.)

Thanks to some good work on the part of faculty involved with those programs, assisted by investments in graduate admissions and marketing of the programs, we are seeing significant growth here, with an increase in graduate enrollment, year to date, of about 25%.

And good news number 2: undergraduate retention was better than projected this past year, led by a freshman to sophomore rate of just under 90% (89.78), compared with about 84% the two prior years. As a result, we expect an additional 53 students above the number projected to return, bringing total undergraduate enrollment to 3,426 fulltime undergraduates (which is an increase of 74 students over last year at this time, even though we graduated a very large class in May).

Retention is, of course, another area in which we are seeing strategic investments—and extraordinary and creative work—producing good results.

All of the excellent work so many of you are doing to engage students early and often, to assess needs and meet students where they are in providing academic and other kinds of support to prepare them for success—is working, as we strengthen an already strongly supportive environment across the College for fostering the holistic development of our students.

Our most significant facilities upgrade this summer represents the centrality of such support to our work, as the entry level of Thomas Hall has been transformed from Dante's into the Center for Student Success. The new space brings together in one convenient location the Center for Academic Success, including advising programs for student-athletes; HEOP; ESL; and the Specialized Resource Center; the Office of Career Pathways, including Career Development and Graduate and Fellowships Advising offices; CSTEP; and Study Abroad; Graduate admissions; and Student Financial Aid. Colleagues from these areas are moving into the new space this week.

And plans are afoot, I understand, for them to host an open house for the community as soon as they are settled. I'm excited about this new addition to our campus—and, more important, about the great work that goes on in these offices.

Last year was once again a year of impressive accomplishment. Reading reports during the summer is a pleasantly exhausting experience! And I'm pleased with how far we've come in recent years in collecting and publicizing accomplishment. New publications—the *Focus on Faculty* (hot off the presses, today!), the President's report, and the very impressive student outcomes report published by the office of career pathways—are helping to tell the story,

internally and externally, of our initiatives and successes in support of our mission and in pursuit of our goals.

A major accomplishment of the year—really the work of the better part of two years—also represents another major step forward in this area: as Bill Clyde points out, the redesign—and repurposing—of the website and the portal represent a huge step forward in our ability to keep apprised, not only of issues crucial to good governance and planning and operations, but also to our sense of shared mission, as we are able to highlight and celebrate so much more than we used to be able to do—and to do so in so much more effective a medium.

The external facing website tells our story—and tells it so much more effectively than was possible before, thanks to the development of scores of individual pages for schools, departments, majors, and programs; the incorporation of some 50 videos and 1,000 photos; and a lively, engaging presentation incorporating calls to action throughout. The portal brings together in one convenient place a remarkable toolset for internal communication and collaboration.

Many thanks to all who worked so hard and well on this project—directed ably by Annie Chambliss and a core team of Julie Achilles and Sarah Schwartz, in addition to Jake Holmquist and his team in IT. And thanks to all who have worked with the Marketing and Communication team—under the leadership of Lydia Gray—in raising our profile and strengthening our external presence and internal communication.

I hope you'll enjoy reading, as I did, in *Focus on Faculty*, of some highlights of the innumerable ways in which our colleagues are contributing to knowledge, engaging students, and serving the community.

“Innumerable” as this work really is, the numbers as reported by the office of institutional research are pretty impressive. According to the report, based on information received from 145 of our 216 fulltime faculty, our faculty in the past year produced 177 refereed publications (books and journal articles); 117 refereed conference presentations; developed 110 innovative teaching practices; and contributed service amounting to 11,835 hours. (That's 493 24-hour days, by the way.) Included in the publication's count are 26 papers and articles resulting from student-faculty collaboration.

But of course it's the quality of the work that is most impressive, as evidenced by the strength of the journals and presses listed in the bibliographies, the awards and accolades—and grants—received by our faculty in support of their work, the number of invited lectures and presentations and other indicators. *Focus on Faculty* really is an impressive compendium of work, and I'm delighted to have it available to the community and as a resource for telling the story—to trustees, alumni, prospective students, academic peers, and the public—of our faculty's commitment to academic excellence.

Also impressive is the annual report of Career Pathways documenting student outcomes in employment and graduate school placements. No one in this room needs to be reminded that we in higher education are increasingly under a microscope as prospective students and their families, not to mention government agencies and the media, ask hard questions about the continuing value of a college education. We have a very good story to tell; and we're

telling it more and more effectively. According to this year's report, based on a 92% response rate from the class of 2015, 89% of the graduates are either employed, in graduate school, or both—with 85% reporting that they are in a field related to their college major field.

Such outcomes—and our increasingly comprehensive gathering and presentation of them—obviously help enormously as we continue to build our reputation for quality as measured by student success. I'd encourage you to take a look at the report—along with so much more!—on the website.

Speaking of more effective telling of the story, we're working on the third edition of the President's report, to be published by the end of the calendar year, which will highlight major accomplishments in the implementation of the major goals of the strategic plan: strengthening our Lasallian Catholic heritage; making the most of our location as a campus in NYC; and capitalizing on the remarkable opportunities we offer thanks to our size and complexity, especially our ability to combine liberal arts and professional education and foster interdisciplinary collaboration.

The report will also include, as it did last year, an update on the financial health of the College. To preview briefly: the story there will continue to be that we are more than holding our own in a difficult environment. We had again a strong end-of-year result, as well as a successful and encouraging year in the development area, with increases in total donors, better-than-projected unrestricted and restricted giving, and an increase of about a million dollars over last year's strong result—just over \$15M (compared with about \$14M last year).

A major project on which the President's Report will have significant detail is the first phase of the campus master plan. With the completion of an extensive STEM study this year, we are in a position to move forward with a bold but realizable plan to transform South campus, bringing together Science, Math, and Engineering disciplines, building a state-of-the-art STEM facility as an extension of Leo; renovating and reconfiguring Leo and RLC; and building student housing on the current site of the physical plant building. This work, urgently needed to support our STEM programs—and recruitment of students and faculty in STEM fields—will create an environment on south campus that is, in its own way, as functional and attractive as is north campus and the Commons area, thereby completing the vision of the “one unified campus” that was part of the motivation for construction of the Commons.

Work has already begun on the Master plan, with the relocation of the physical plant and design work on the new buildings well underway. The hope is to complete the first phase of this transformation by the fall of 2020.

We are working as well on many fronts to assure that funding will be in place to realize the plan—and I'm looking forward eagerly to working with members of our community on our next major comprehensive campaign. This campaign-in-planning will not only aim to fund the Master plan; it will also and just as importantly build the College endowment, allowing the creation of faculty chairs, fostering innovative academic work throughout the College, and providing financial aid for the next generation of young men and women who will find

in Manhattan College their gateway to the future. I can't wait to get out there—and out there I will be this year . . . and next year . . . and for as long as it takes—telling our story and encouraging investment in this great enterprise.

As we look forward to the coming year, I'm inspired and encouraged by many new and ongoing projects, large and small, that were advanced during the “goals” phase of last year's reporting.

On that theme:

I look forward to the continuing innovation of our faculty in challenging and supporting our students, developing the curricula they need to prepare themselves for life and work, and strengthening the position of the College in the intellectual and cultural world of the city and beyond;

I'm delighted to see plans for the expansion and deepening of the many programs that take educational advantage of our diversity, assisting us to engage in and develop “radical empathy” and apply our talents to building peace and understanding;

I'm excited about the ever-more creative ways we're integrating academics with the holistic student experience, work that is appropriately recognized this year in the renaming of what used to be Student Activities as “Student Engagement”;

I'm inspired by the continuing attentiveness of our community in putting into action the core values of our Lasallian heritage—assuring that our core identity is vibrant and visible in so many ways;

And of course and especially, I know that we all look forward eagerly to the as yet unnamed accomplishments in the coming year of those “entrusted to our care”—the 3,426 undergraduates (and 466 grad students . . . and counting) who will study here in the coming year . . .

So let's reconvene downstairs in anticipatory celebration of all of the good to come this year: the brilliant conversations and intellectual breakthroughs; the research projects and service experiences; the athletic contests won—with maybe a championship or two?; the service-learning experiences that open hearts and minds and change lives; and all of the wondrous epiphanies and transformations that we as educators are so privileged to be part of . . .

I can't wait to see what you'll do this year!